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Book

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Time , Chemistry , Chance and Human Design

Time, Chemistry, Change and Human Design



"Aesthetic analysis just limits the field of representation to what the unaided eye can see, and then marks the visible material traces as represented effects that are no less a part of the content or meaning of the statement than is the object of mimesis. Having said this, it's important to add that one or more categories of visible traces may contribute to that meaning. One attends to incisional changes made during the act of painting [or] to structural changes that affect the material fabric of the painting after its completion [the latter consisting] of alterations produced by time, chemistry, chance, and human design..."

¹ Harry Berger, Jr., *Fictions of the Poet: Rembrandt Against the Italian Renaissance*, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 390.

Within Pliny the Elder's Natural History, the encyclopedist recalls the tale of the Corinthian potter Bupalos whose daughter was in love with a man whose departure was imminent and whose hour of absence was indeterminable. By way of providing his daughter with some reminder of what would soon be lost, the potter traced the profile of the man's face by way of his shadow upon the adjacent wall. In addition to, as Lisa Salzmann notes, Pliny the Elder's anecdote figuring a "material trace of a fugitive body," it also more fundamentally enacts a process whereby one surface is temporarily applied to and rests upon another with the intention (explicit or otherwise) of removing one of the two surfaces but not the residual information that has become inscribed as a result.¹

Following Charles Peirce's formulation, various phenomena could potentially be understood within such terms. For example, a footprint in the snow, the stain left on a newspaper by the

¹ Lisa Salzmann, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 3.

bottom of a coffee cup and the tyre marks left on the road after the driver was forced to break all people the "ability to stand for something by virtue of an accidental connection to it."²

But how might we begin to approach an understanding of the index that exceeds the interpretive prism of photography?

According to Klaus Wehnert, whereas for example the "emergency exit" sign is a sign that points at its object by deliberately employing the concept of indexicality... [phenomena such as] a footprint or a bullet hole is a index or a trace and it is a natural sign that carries a proof that it refers to what was there and is now absent."³ The corollary that follows, and, as Wehnert notes, is that

² Martin LeFebvre, 'The Art of Pointing. On Pencil, Indexicality, and Photographic Images,' in James Elkins, (ed.) *Photography Theory*, London; New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 222.

³ Klaus Wehnert, 'Photography - museum. On posing, image-ness and pin-pointing,' in *The Thing About Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Conservation*, Sandra Dudley et al (eds) London: Routledge, 2012, p. 88.

the index has "one very crucial attribute and that is the element of time. A trace or an imprint always refers to a specific singular member of being, which must by default be in the past, and therefore it is always 'historic.'" ⁴ What Wetzel's statement educates then is twofold; firstly there are indeed instances of natural phenomena that exceed the realm of photographic visibility.

Secondly, and as such, the indexical sign does instantiate a particular relationship to time, or more specifically, to tense. But the temporality accorded is never just history in itself; the indexical sign, the imprint never merely consigns the work of the world's visibility to the past but rather to a past, a past that is as specific as the member of being to which the imprint refers and indexically registers.

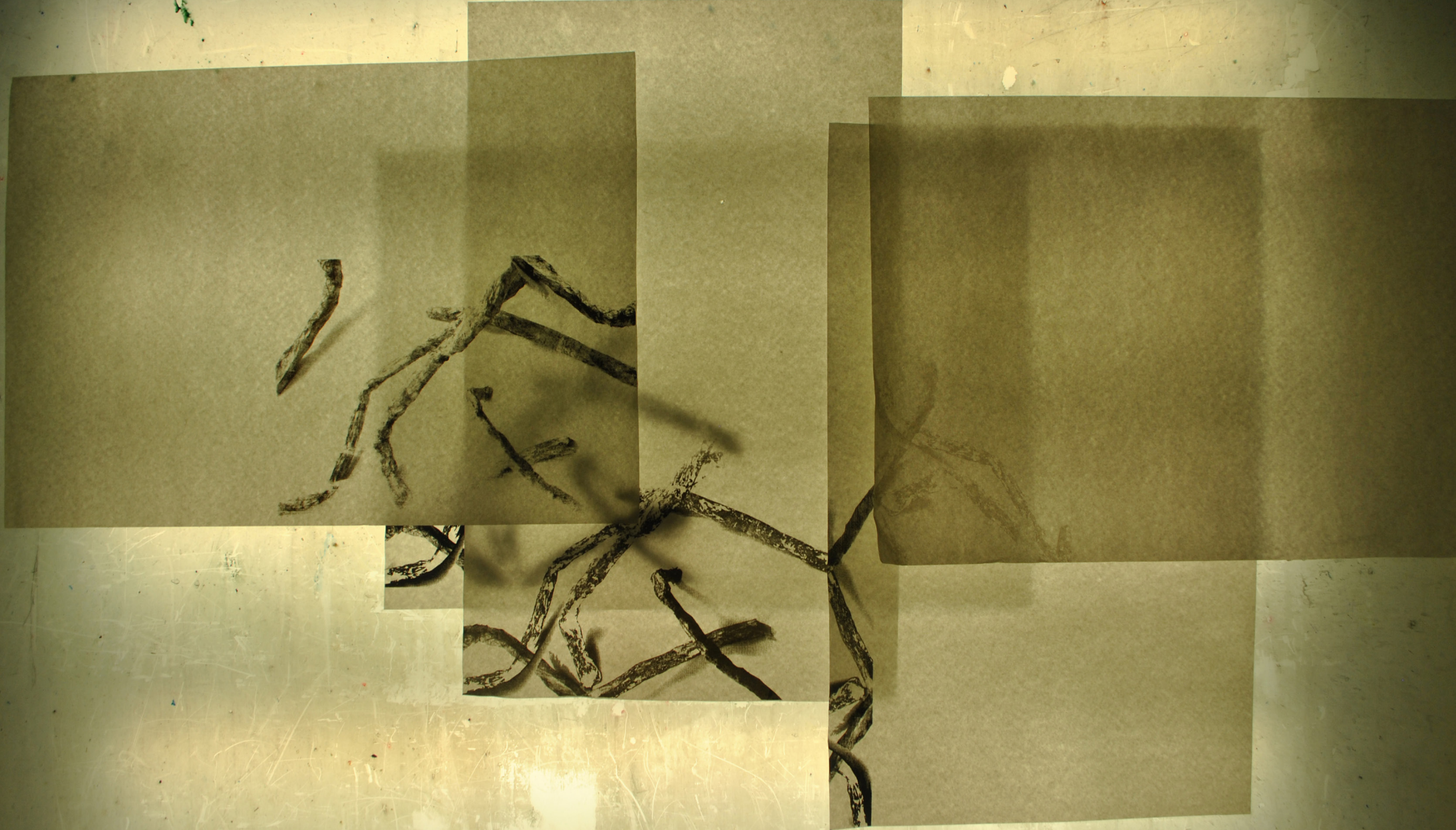
⁴ Ibid.

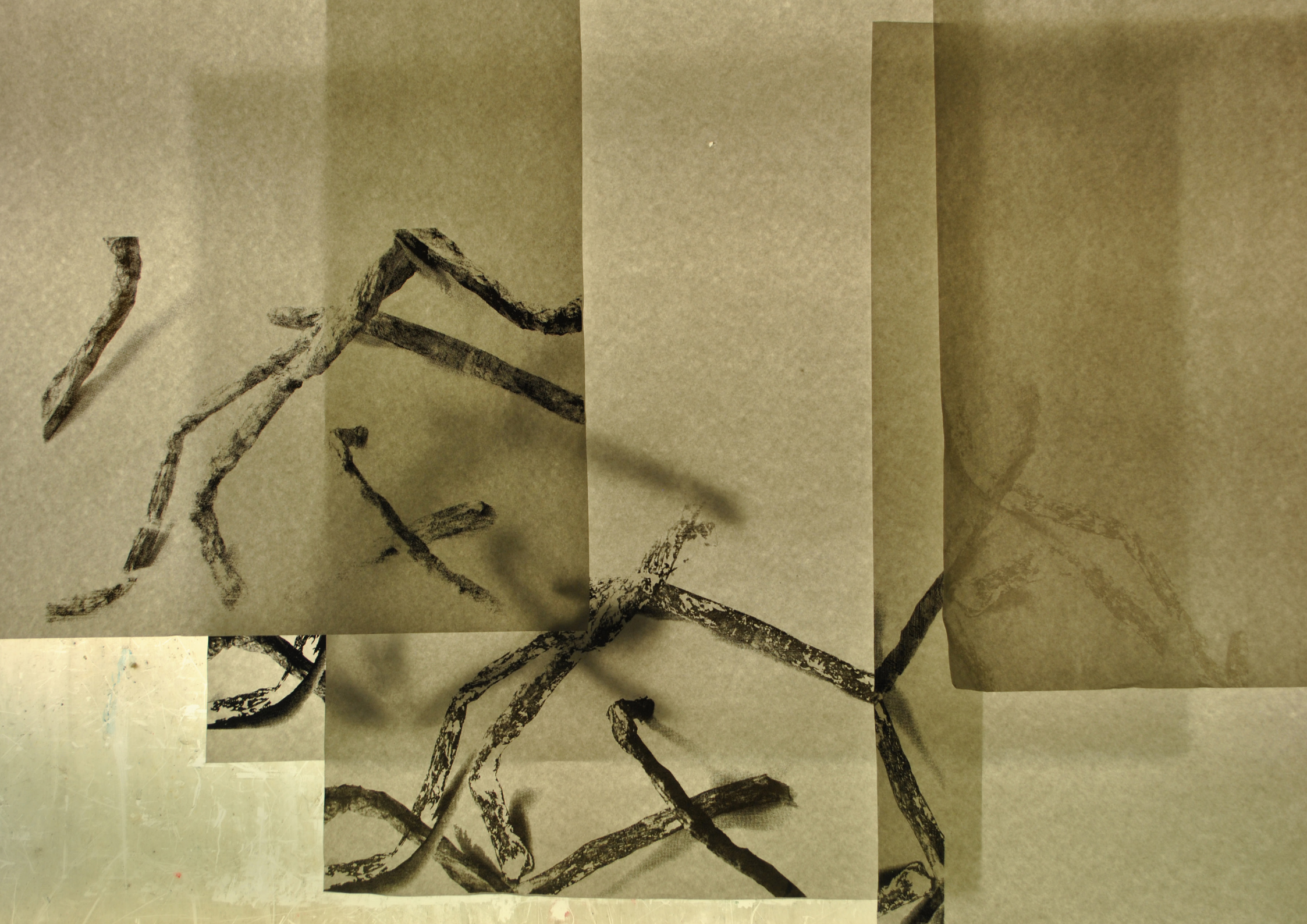




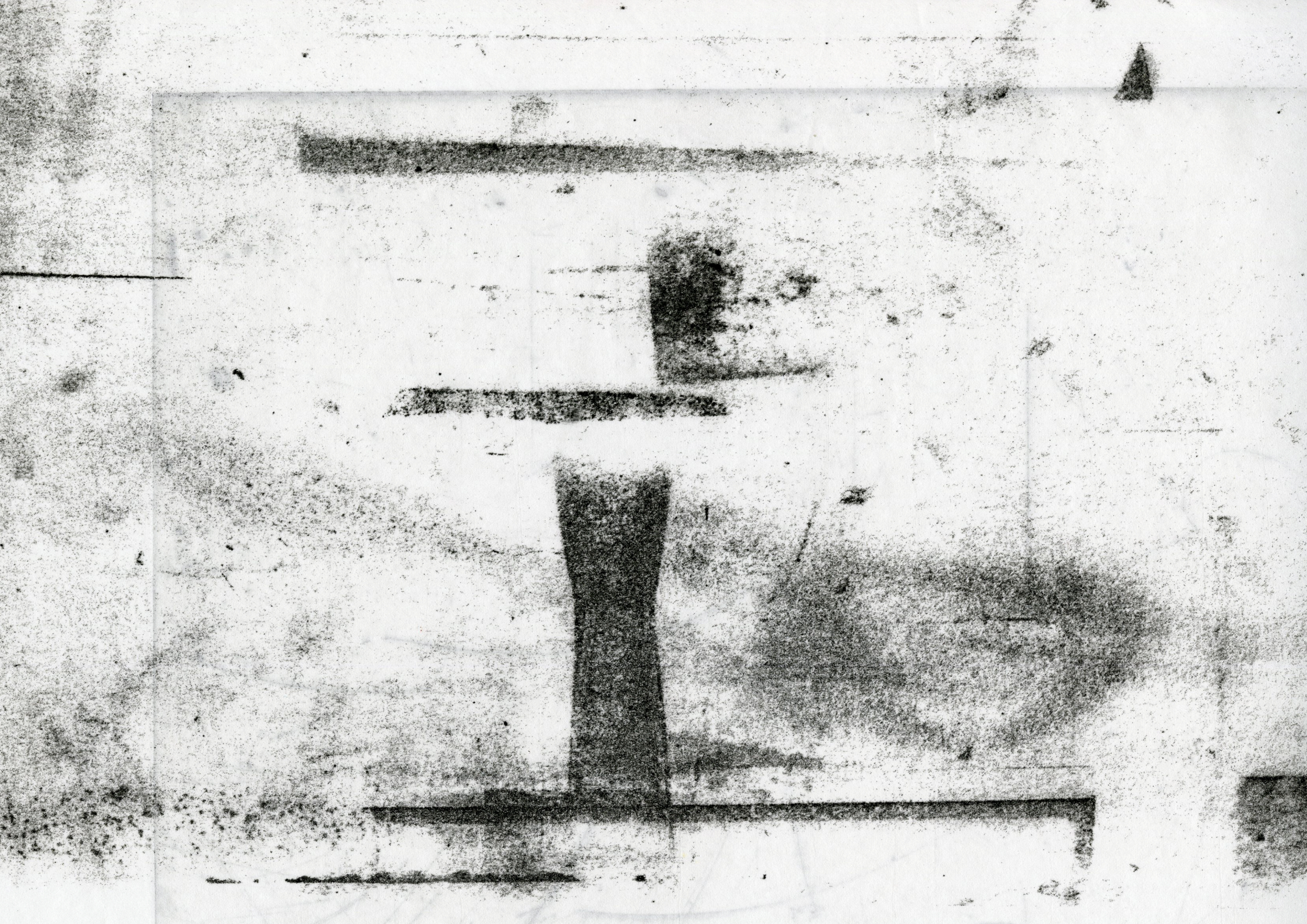
The image for [Walter] Benjamin - and here it would be necessary, if we had time, to place this image of the image into syntactic relation with other images of the image that traverse Benjamin's writings, such as the dialectical image, the filmic image of reproducibility, the image of Proust and Kafka, the Denkbild, or "thought-image," and so on - the image for Benjamin encrypts the possibility of a decline or decay, a ruinous absence, the sense of a withdrawal that is already silently at work within it.⁵

⁵ Gerhard Richter, *Adorners: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 143.









Two circular pods, quaking time in separate worlds;
dark to light; cloud lit and night;
the sulphuric green seeps under doorways,
in the other tick is to tock,
the rain hammers hard, drip dropping down zindoes
pulling quashes downwards to silt
the still quite revolving, the olfactory burn,
musty chemical underscore is not lost
yet the pattern of movement just shifts
rubber saucers into position and the quakers go down
sideways leaning
to pull into repose
the spray hangs lightly, skin prickling ice cold
electric clangs resound as screen contacts steel door
body stoops to crouch
as the shift between worlds causes eyes to squint,
seeking resolve and cognition
self checking question slick to slick.

Registration¹ regis/tra/tion redzi'strei 5e^on noun

Origin: mid 16th century from medieval Latin registratio based on Latin regere meaning to enter, record.

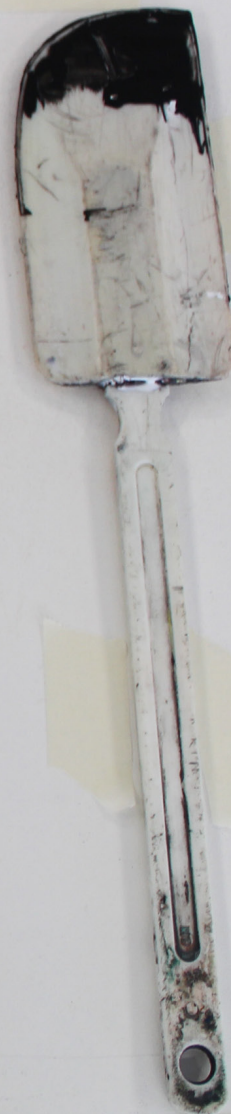
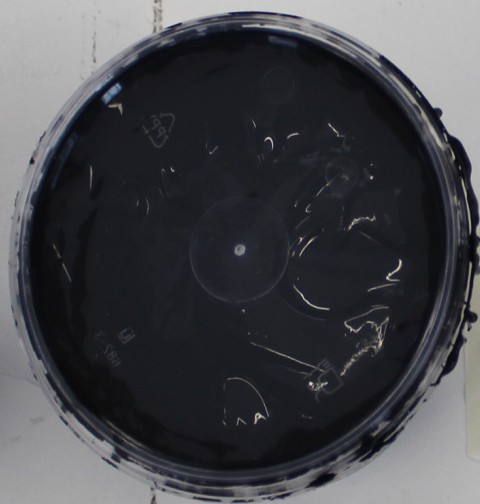
- 1) the act of recording a name or information on an official list.
- 2) the action or process of registering or being registered.
- 3) a certificate that attests to the registering of a person, a car, etc.
- 4) the action or process of acquiring full British citizenship by a commonwealth resident or a person of British descent.
- 5) a combination of stops used when playing the organ.
- 6) precision alignment and placement.

The purpose of the creative process; the mark and the labour, then, is not worshipping at the altar of 'skill', nor is it a nostalgia for a past that becomes merely a visual trope or rhetoric for misplaced historicism; rather it seeks a radical idealism through acceptance of the subjective, mysticism and wonder. This is mediated through what Nochlin (1994) posits regarding the fragment as a poignant metaphor for the experience of Modernity; a means of engaging with our condition both in recognition of loss but also as means to reimagine our being. Indeed in recent re-workings of Utopian thought it has been articulated that fragmentation is in fact an integral '*condition of the act of creation*' (Gether in Gether et al, 2012, p.10). As such creative labour is, by nature, a fragmented subjectivity that points to an engagement with our past in order to revolutionise our future. Practices that exist in such a space accept, as Stern (2014) puts it, an '*ontogenesis... It's a coming into being ...it's always already in process*'. The endeavour of making, therefore stands outside of time, for what, on the surface, appears to engage merely with capturing and preserving moments, in fact, like the Janus, directs us to reflect on where we came from, where we are...

...and to where we are going.

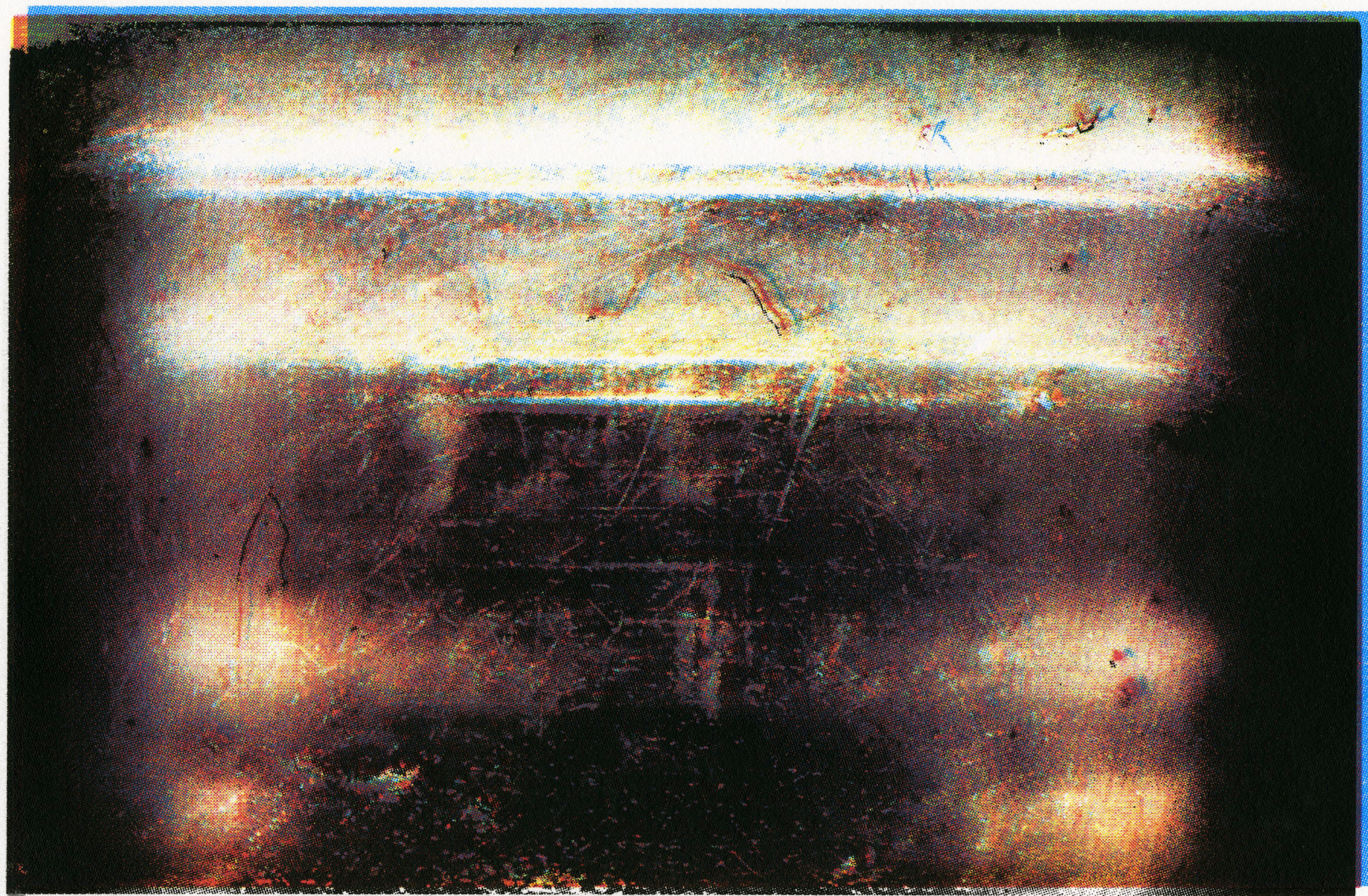












"As early as the commentary on the texts of Plato and Aristotle that invoked the metaphor of the wax imprint, I proposed distinguishing three sorts of traces: the written trace, which has become the documentary trace on the plane of the historiographical operation; the psychical trace, which can be termed impression rather than imprint, impression in the sense of an affectation left in us by marking - or as we say, striking - even; finally, the cerebral, cortical trace which the neurosciences deal with."⁶

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory History Forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamney and David Pellauer, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 145.

"With the graphite, the experiential mark has a substance made up by the physical residue left by the marker's incision: the smear of graphite, the stain of ink, the well thrown up by the pen knife's slash. But the form of the mark - at this level of "experience" - is itself peculiar, for it inhabits the realm of the clue, the trail, the index. Which is to say the operations of form are those of marking an event - by forming it in terms of its remains, or its precipitate - and so in marking it, of cutting the event off from the temporality of its marking."⁷

The imprint, if we are to approach the index-as-imprint as a "specific singular moment of being," remains both particular to and contingent upon certain modes of temporality.

Rather than shade the body, or raise the bodily, the imprint necessarily inscribes its specificity through the locus of a domain and an

⁷ Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 259.

operation that is embodied.

Alexander Nemerov, in an essay that discusses the poetry of Emily Dickinson, draws the reader's attention towards Virginia Jackson's interpretation of Dickinson's poem "On the World you Coloured" as a form of pencimento. According to Nemerov, Jackson sees the "aimless" new morning that Dickinson describes as replacing "the actions of the previous day, when the self had conquered realms with the Robin. Yet the poem makes us feel that something of the previous day shows through, the conquered or chartered still appears in the aimless new morning." ⁸

A pencimento is a discernable trail that evidences some aspect of a painting's composition prior to the artist making a subsequent set of revisions that have covered over the previous compositional stage.

⁸ Alexander Nemerov, "Visual Arts: The Pencimento" in Emily Dickinson in Context, Eliza Richards (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, unpaginated.

Although the penimento carries with it a certain affinity with the palimpsesto, this term usually applies to documents that carry second as opposed to visual inscription. Nevertheless, the penimento, like its descriptive counterpart betrays the proclivity to congeal into the work of art and the condition of being in a state of flux.

"[T]he minochrome is such a laboured achievement of erasure or covering over. In both instances there is a sense of there being something else physically beneath or temporally prior to the finished work. A palimpsest. Not a tabula rasa. Never singular nor clean nor clear, palimpsests are always already marked by the world, by contingency. They are not beginnings or ends but continuations." ⁹

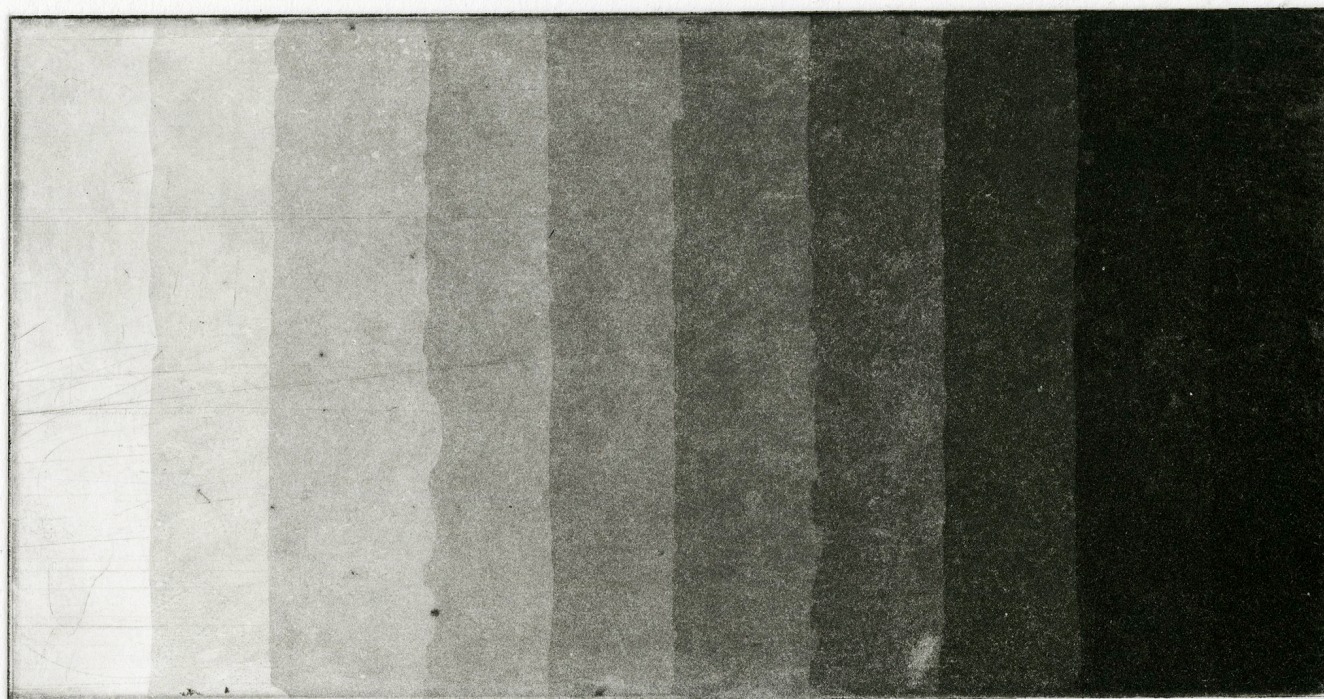
⁹ David Batchelor, "In bed with the minochrome," in *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*, Peter Osborne (ed.), London: Serpent's Tail, 2000, pp 157-58.

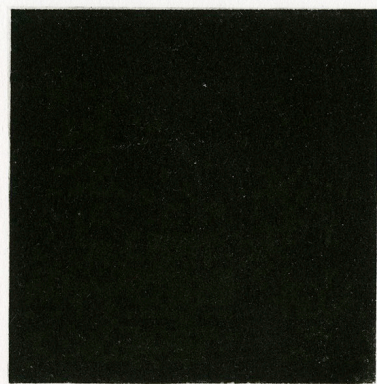






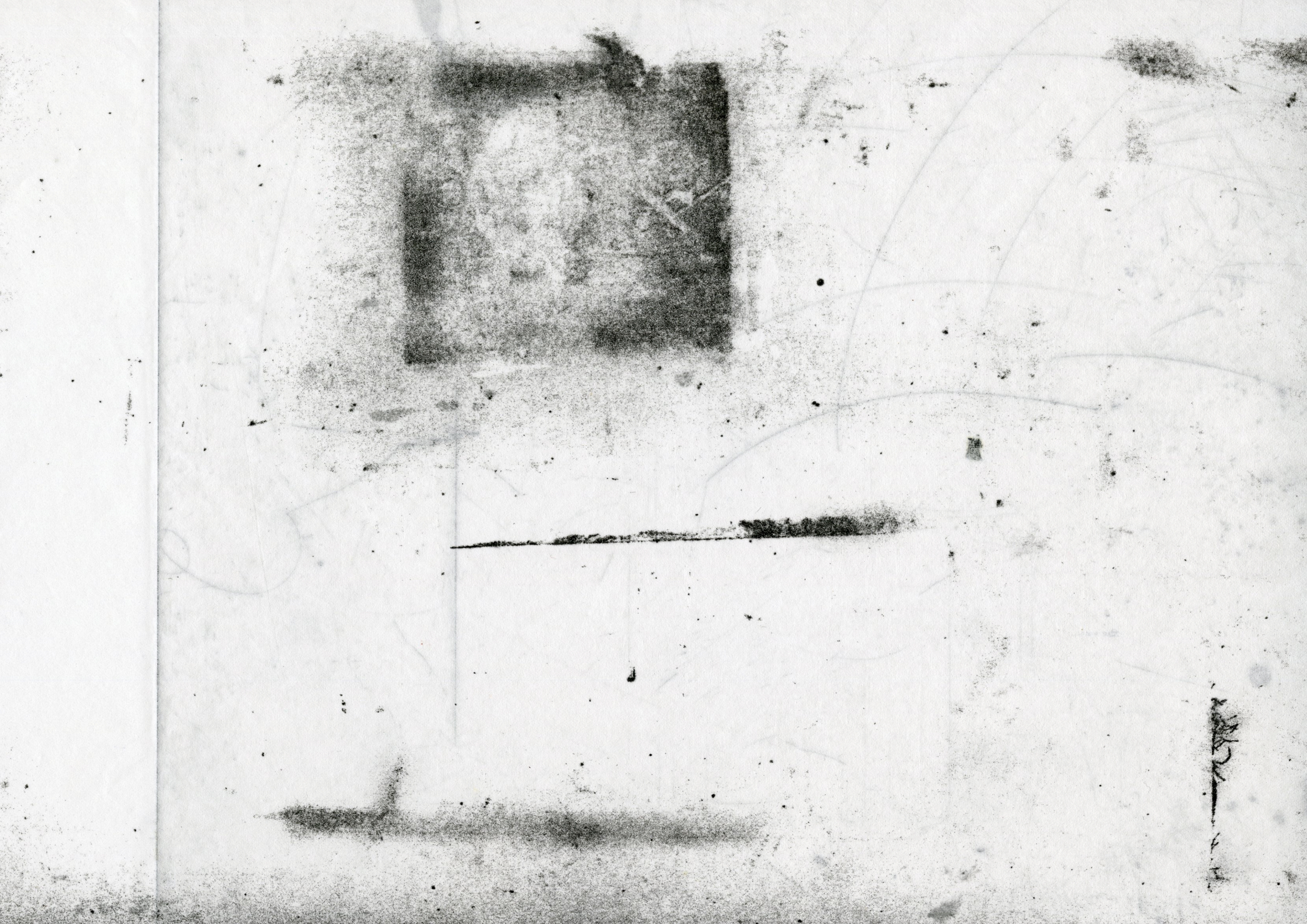






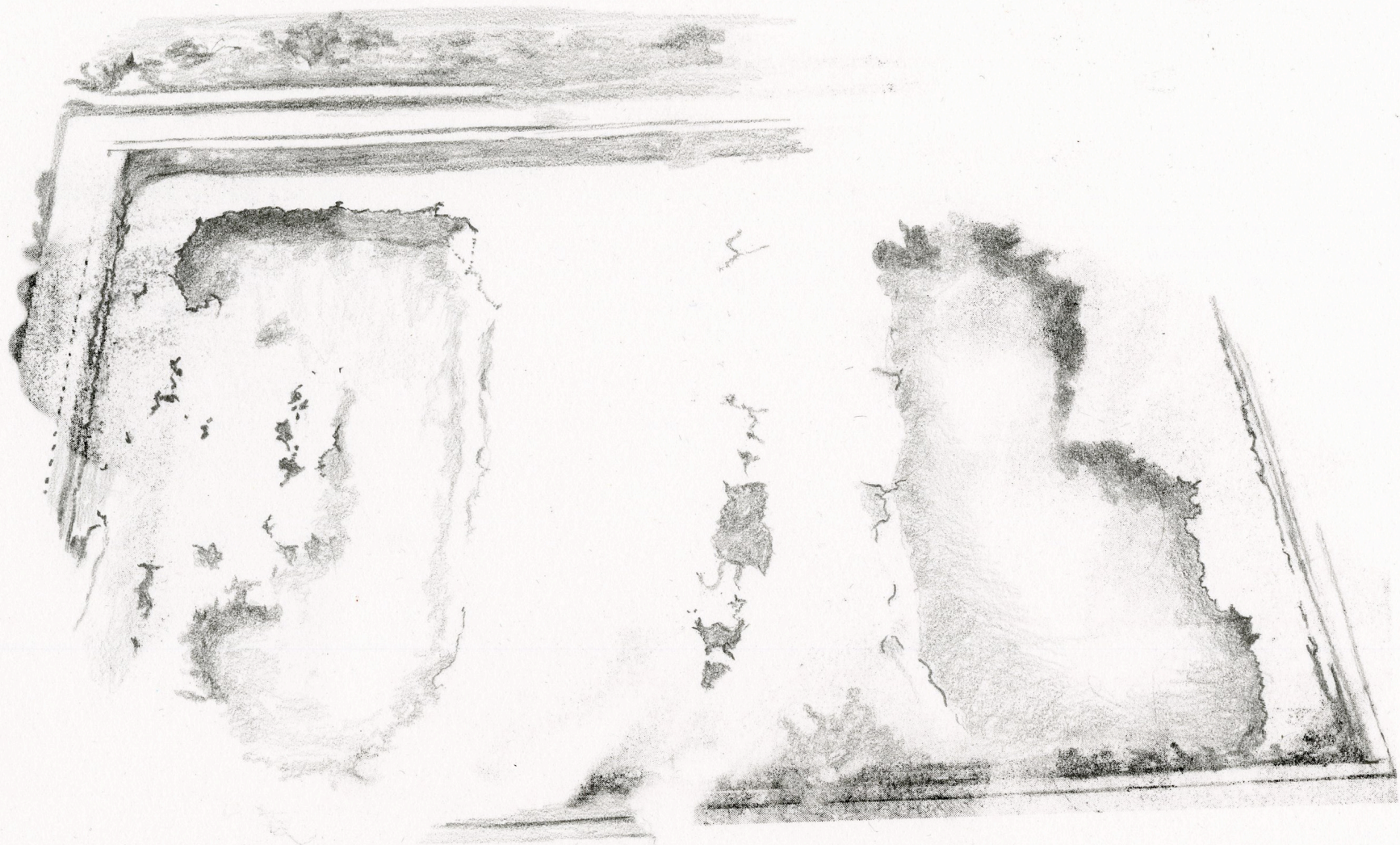
"For Malevich painting involved arousal and pure sensation in an act of creation which was bound up in bodily sensation and no longer in nature." ¹⁰

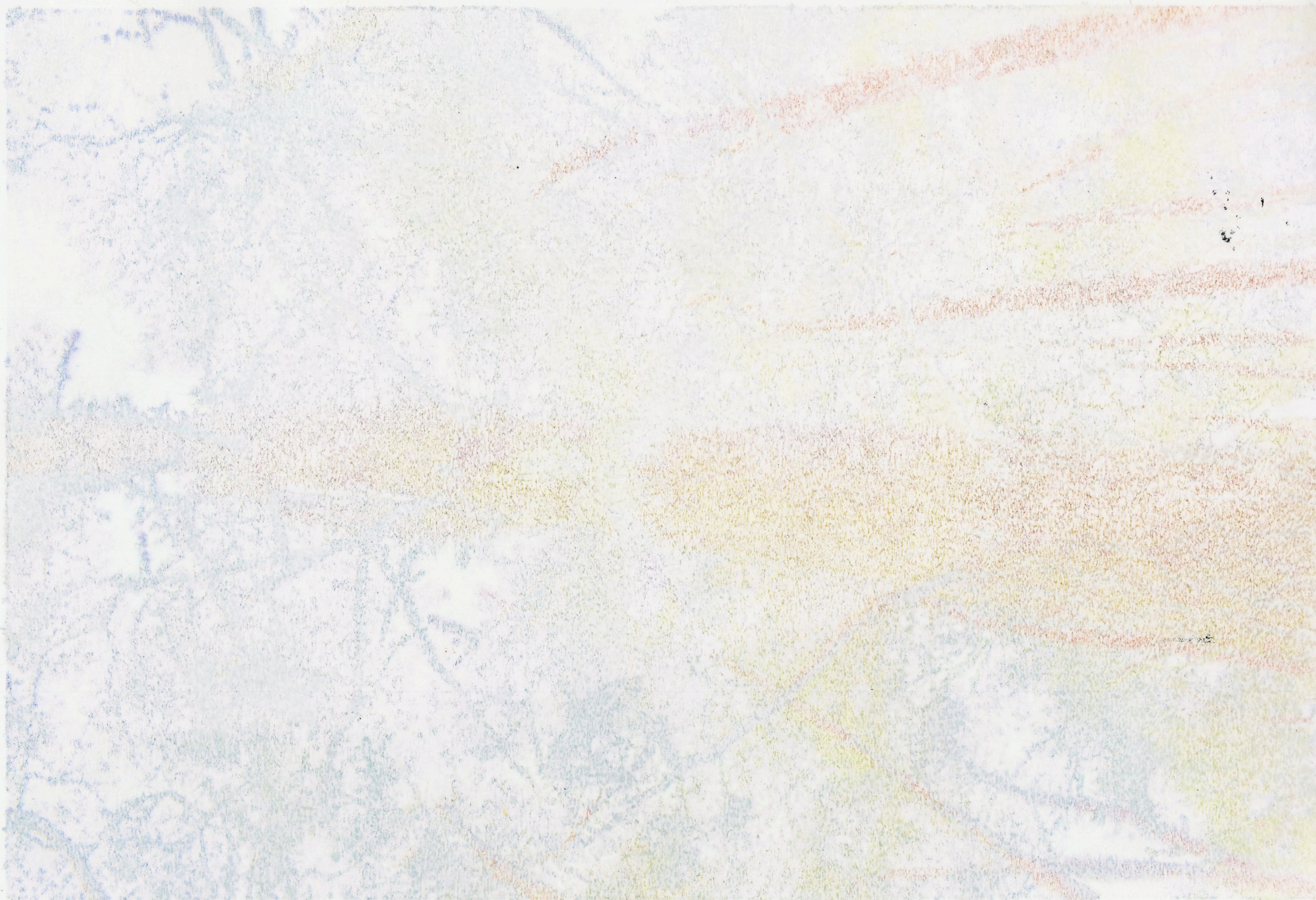
¹⁰ Ginter Umbrey + Jan Thein-Pittker, "Black Sun: A Conversation About the Art of Painting a Black Picture," in Ginter Umbrey: Body of Painting, Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2000, p. 94



In Dickinson's poem wherein there exists the possibility for something of the previous day to show through, the conditions of possibility might also be such that as much as we can speak of the imprint as a singular moment of being, we arguably might also be able to speak of the imprinting of being as occurring within a set of terms that are necessarily plural or more specifically durational in both sense and impact. This durational mode of being, wherein events intentional or socialized changes figure a prior body, an absented body in the same way that both Skin With O'Hara Poem and the tale of Busados do. And although the process differs, (to that and Skin With O'Hara Poem works through the less urgency of touch, the tale of the Corinthian potter works through the drawing of an outline), there are the examples considered in our discussion here both work to inscribe an answer present that becomes consonant with the visible conditions of retrospection. Or, put another way, whilst all of the examples originate from the demand of agency, the way work towards are the conditions of possibility to inscribe the image within a particular temporality.

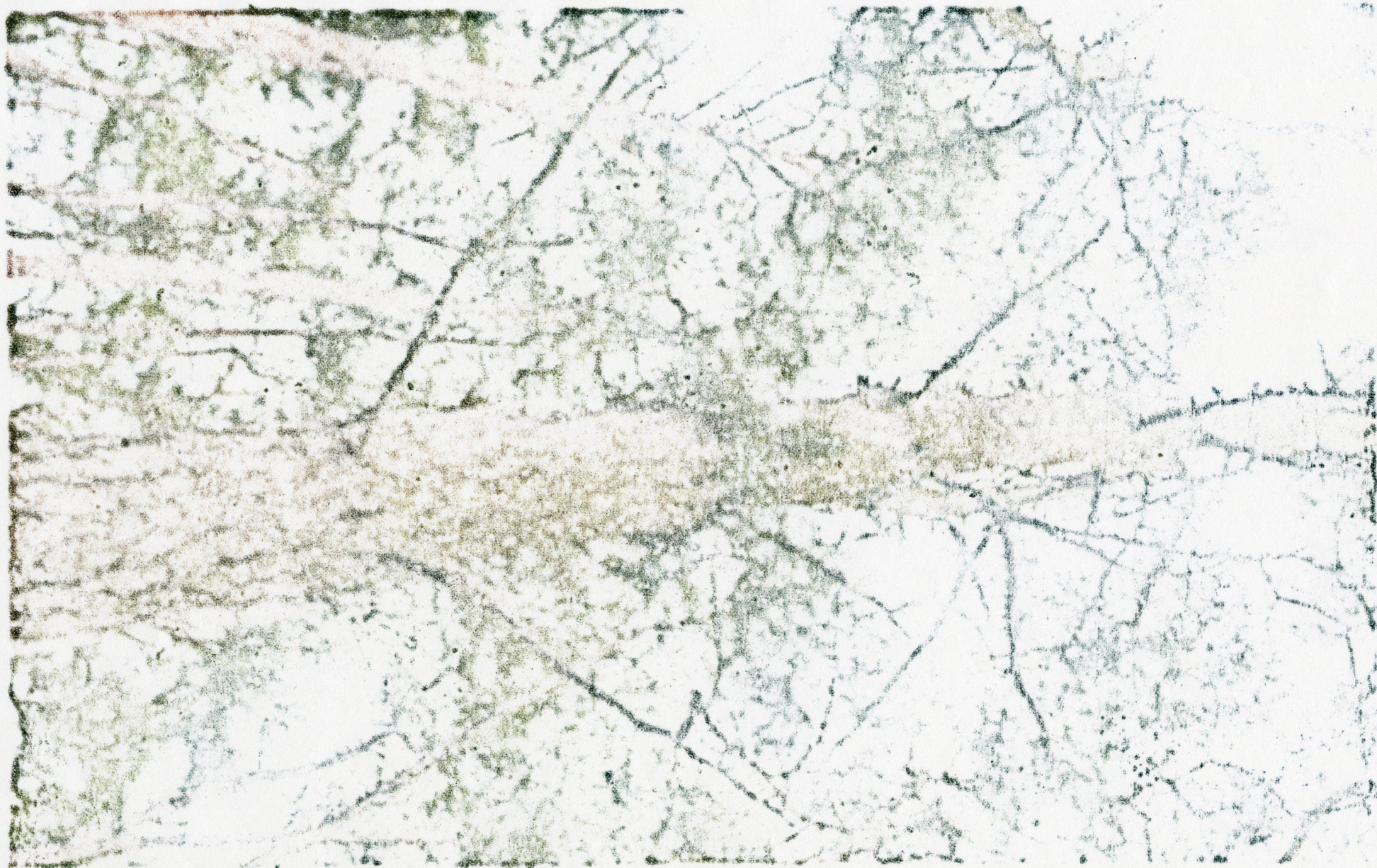












"I want to believe we don't forget, that memory is inscribed on these long-lasting cerebral convoluted cells of ours like a palimpsest, traces of a painting covered by a more recent artist's paint. I want to believe the hidden pigments remain there, shadowy as ghosts, waiting for the conservator's x-ray to bring them back. ""

"Margot Singer, "Afterimage," *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative*, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 2008, p. 74.

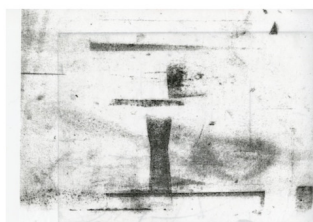
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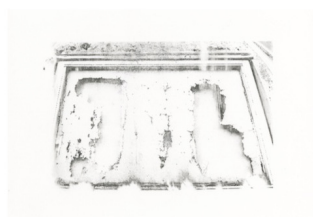
Susanne Ballinger



Elaine Elcoat



*Catriona Leahy,
Lecturer in Printmaking
University of Northampton*



Mimi Tobot



Elizabeth Tomos

Text by:

*Dr. Craig Staff,
Reader in Fine Art
University of Northampton*

In February 2015, four Fine Art Masters students from the University of Northampton (Susanne Ballinger, Elaine Elcoat, Mimi Tobot and Elizabeth Tomos), accompanied by Lecturer in Printmaking, Catriona Leahy and Reader in Fine Art, Dr. Craig Staff, attended the Frans Masereel Centrum for Printmaking, Belgium, as part of their annual Schools in Residence Programme.

In the lead-up to this residency, the students and staff met periodically. We discussed the thread that binds the artists' sensibilities. We negotiated the language of print and its evolving *dialect*. We considered its relationship, both tangential and direct, towards the distinctive practices of each individual. Although diverse, the artists were unified by a common curiosity of the inherently tactile materiality of print, its transferability, and its agency to convene multiplicities of meaning. To that end, the artists navigated the discipline's expanding territory, testing its language against that of drawing, performance, sculpture and installation.

Foregrounding the value of tacit knowledge - of making as thinking, the residency was not intended to result in a finite project with resolved outcomes, but rather sought to illuminate the inherently unstable and largely unknowable nature of a phase, a period of time spent working and researching, in its development. The residues left in the aftermath of this research period, this space, which form the pages of this publication, represent propositions, notions, notations, a kind of speculative journey. It calls to mind the finite phenomenon of experience, a moment in time, and the need to render it permanent through an imprint. Reminiscent of the artist book and defiantly object-like, this publication represents an artefact that fixes the traces of documentation, which archive presence and impel future recollection and revisiting.

Catriona Leahy, Lecturer in Printmaking.

With special thanks to



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